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ABSTRACT

In the United States over one million adolescent girls will become pregnant each year. Adolescent pregnancy often leads to truncated educational attainment and subsequently results in a prolonged cycle of poverty and dependence. This study investigated feelings of self-esteem and romanticism among pregnant adolescents (N=276), adolescent mothers (N=128), and a control group of non-pregnant, non-parenting adolescent girls (N=316). The Bachman Self-Esteem Scale and the Dean Romanticism Scale were administered to these subjects. In regard to self-esteem, results indicated that there was a significant main effect for race, but not for group or age. In regard to romanticism, significant effects were found for group and race, but not for age. The significant findings for self-esteem and race suggest that self-esteem remains stable with age among White and Hispanic subjects. However, Black subjects' self-esteem scores seem to increase with age and Asian subjects' scores tend to decrease with age. A possible explanation for this finding could be that different socialization experiences of these ethnic groups significantly influence feelings of self-worth. With regard to group differences, the control group had significantly lower romanticism scores when compared to pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers. This finding suggests that respondents in the control group may be more realistic and practical than pregnant adolescents or adolescent mothers. (ABL)

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A Study of Self-Esteem and Romanticism Among Pregnant Adolescents, Adolescent Mothers, and a Control Group in Southern California

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ABSTRACT

Every year in the United States, over one million adolescents girls will become pregnant (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1990). The present study investigated feelings of self-esteem and romanticism among pregnant adolescents, adolescent mothers, and a control group. The Bachman Self-Esteem Scale and the Dean Romanticism Scale were distributed to 720 adolescent girls. For self-esteem, the researchers found a significant main effect for race. For romanticism, results indicated main effects for group and race. Implications for educators and counselors will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time for fun, a time for friends, and a time of confusion.The transition between childhood and adulthood can be an exciting yet challenging stage of development. This developmental period is characterized by rapid physical, social, and emotional changes. Sexual experimentation, identity exploration, and the desire to conform to peer group norms are typical of adolescence.

Sometimes adolescents behave without careful consideration of the consequences involved. Experimenting with sexual encounters and teenage pregnancy may be two such negative outcomes. In the United States over one million adolescent girls will become pregnant each year (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1990). Adolescent pregnancy often leads to truncated educational attainment and subsequently results in a prolonged cycle of poverty and dependence (Furstenburg, 1976; Marini, 1984; Mott & Maxwell, 1981).

The outcomes of early parenthood are long lasting, affecting both the teen mother and her child. Besides the health risks of early pregnancy and childbearing, adolescent mothers are also confronted with

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psychological, social, and educational challenges. The economic future for mother and baby is often times grim.

There is research evidence which suggests a relationship between self-esteem and adolescent pregnancy (Patten, 1981; and, 1977). There is, however, a lack of information on the relationship between romanticism and adolescent pregnancy.

PURPOSE

The objectives of the present study are to compare feelings of self-esteem and romanticism in relation to age and race among pregnant adolescents, adolescent mothers. and a control group.

PROCEDURE

Questionnaires were distributed to 720 adolescents between the ages of 12-19 years. The sample consisted of 276 pregnant adolescents, 128 adolescent mothers (whose babies were between birth to six months of age), and 316 nonpregnant, non-parenting adolescent girls. The sample consisted of 229 White subjects (32%), 187 Hispanic subjects (26%), 186 Black subjects (26%), and 47 Asian subjects (6%) 71 subjects (10%) were in the "Other" category.

The pregnant adolescents were enrolled in a pregnant minor program at a continuation high school or living in a maternity home in Southern California. The adolescent mothers were enrolled in a School Age Mother program at a continuation high school in Southern California. Respondents in the control group were enrolled in seven different high schools in the Southern California area. All subjects independently completed a questionnaire consisting of the Bachman Self-Esteem Scale and the Dean Romanticism Scale.

RESULTS

Scores on the Bachman Self-Esteem Scale ranged from 0-5 and the mean self-esteem score for all subjects was 4.00. The Dean Romanticism Scale scores ranged from 0-160 with an overall average score of 93. A 2 (group) by 2 (age) by 4 (race) analysis of variance was performed for each dependent variable. The dependent variables were self-esteem and romanticism.

For self-esteem, results indicated that there was a significant main effect for race ($F(3,6)=11.32$, $p>.0001$) but not for group or age. This main effect can be qualified by a significant interaction between race and age ($F(3,6)(=2.81$, $p>.05$). Refer to Table 1 for self-esteem means.

For romanticism, the researchers found significant main effects for group ($F(2,6)=6.89$, $p>.001$) and race ($F(3,6)=5.49$, $p>.001$) but not for age. With regard to group differences, pregnant adolescent's mean romanticism score was 94.13, adolescent mother's mean score was 94.72, while the control groups mean romanticism score was 90.93. The mean romanticism scores for the ethnic groups were as follows: White=93.87, Hispanic=91.52, Black=94.29, Asian=87.40.

DISCUSSION

The significant findings for self-esteem and race suggest that self-esteem remains stable with age among White and Hispanic subjects. However, Black subject's self-esteem scores seem to increase with age and Asian subject's scores tend to decrease with age (refer to Table 1 for self-esteem means).

A possible explanation for this finding could be that different socialization experiences of these ethnic groups significantly influence feelings of self-worth. There is some evidence that among pregnant and nonpregnant adolescents, Blacks have a higher self-esteem when compared to Whites and Mexican-Americans (Held, 1981; and Vernon, Green, and Frothingham, 1983). With regard to Asian families, members are expected to submerge feelings to further the well-being of the family and its reputation (Sue and Sue, 1972). Asian adolescents might experience guilt and shame due to the pressures from the family to conform to traditional, cultural norms. In western society, as adolescents mature, there is an attempt to individuate from the family. In the Asian culture, when adolescents do not conform to family norms, they may be considered selfish, inconsiderate, and ungrateful (Sue, 1981). This in turn may contribute to the Asian American adolescent experiencing feelings of inadequacy and consequently lower feelings of self-esteem.

Two variables which were significantly related to romanticism were group and race. With regard to group differences, the control group had significantly lower romanticism scores when compared to pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers. This finding suggests that the respondents in the control group may be more realistic and practical than pregnant adolescents or adolescent mothers. Non-

pregnant, non-parenting adolescents may not idealize pregnancy, motherhood or romantic relationships. Adolescents who are pregnant or parenting infants (birth to six months) may have a more romantic and idealistic view of relationships and marriage. With regard to race, Asians had the lowest mean romanticism score, followed by Hispanics. Whites and Blacks had the highest romanticism scores. Although there is no empirical evidence linking romanticism and race, the concepts of love, romance, and marriage are known to vary from culture to culture (Shon and Davis, 1982; and Suzuki, 1982). In the Asian family, the choice of a mate is often heavily influenced by the families on both sides. Traditionally, a person does not marry without the blessings of their family members (Shon and Davis, 1982). As a result, Asian adolescents may experience apprehension about "falling in love" because of the strong parental influence in mate selection. Asians also may be more realistic and fatalistic which could account for their lower feelings of romanticism (Shon and Davis, 1982; and Suzuki, 1985).

IMPLICATIONS

Programs for adolescents, including those for pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers, need to have a focus on promoting self-esteem, while strongly emphasizing skills involved in developing realistic plans for the future. By providing opportunities to explore, problem solve, empathize, and question, we may raise adolescents' awareness of romanticism vs. reality and promote decisions to contracept or delay sexual activity.

- Special support groups which are sensitive to age and ethnic differences may help pregnant and parenting adolescents overcome the risks of early pregnancy.
- Education, with a focus on self-esteem and romanticism, could help prevent adolescent pregnancy and parenting.
- These programs should also focus on the psychological and social challenges associated with sexual activity, pregnancy, and parenting during adolescence.

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Table 1

Self-esteem Scores by Age and Race

		AGE	
		Younger 12-15	Older 16-19
RACE	White	3.95	3.94
	Hispanic	3.94	3.99
	Black	3.96	4.26
	Asian	4.26	3.55